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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Officer added to collect court fines: Kalamazoo County creates new position to recoup funds for courts, crime victims

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KALAMAZOO -- Kalamazoo County Circuit Judge Gary C. Giguere Jr. has a message to those who owe money to the court or to the victims of their crimes: It is time to pay up.

The Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners voted Tuesday to grant the court's request for the creation of a court-collections officer, whose responsibilities would include assessing the ability of those convicted of crimes to pay fines, costs and restitution. The officer also would monitor whether the payments were made.

Currently, court personnel spend 100 to 180 hours per month outside of regular work time to perform those duties, Giguere said.

"This is about finding out what people can afford to pay and then aggressively seeking that amount," Giguere said. "This officer will help us do that."

The judge said he didn't know how much outstanding money needs to be collected, but he said it is almost certainly more than the up to \$63,000 that the person in the new position would receive in salary and benefits.

The court has had trouble recovering funds for such things as the costs associated with closing methamphetamine labs, and getting fines and restitution payments from those who have written bad checks, Giguere said.

A collections court was established in June and operates once a month for a half-day, Giguere said. It forces those who have not been paying the money they owe to come in and explain why.

Those who have the ability to pay but are not could face jail time, Giguere said.

The court also can examine past-due payments owed. One person recently brought before the collections court owed money for 10 years, Giguere said.

"Fear can be a great motivating factor for getting people to pay their fines," he said. "We're trying to send a message out there that we're serious about recouping these funds, not only for the court, but also for those victimized by crimes."